

Julia Sauve's Speech Regarding Student Representation on Local Boards of Education

Hello, I am Julia Sauve from Marlborough Connecticut. Thank you for allowing me some of your time today to address the importance of student representation on local Boards of Education. I am a member on the State Student Advisory Council on Education, a group that addresses issues involving student voice. Many members of this council, myself included, also serve on local Boards of Education. It is evident to us that student voice and participation greatly enhance education. Therefore, I feel it would be very advantageous if all schools in Connecticut implemented a non-voting seat on local boards for a selected student representative from the district. Although representatives have no actual vote to sway outcomes, student input may significantly alter board member's outlooks.

Because the decisions made affect the students above all, it is essential that Boards of Education obtain an accurate understanding of the student body. Student representation provides a general portrayal of the collective attitudes of the student body as a whole. This understanding of student attitude by a Board of Education allows decisions to be made realistically, taking into account student opinion. Students are therefore critical partners who challenge ineffective, unrealistic practices throughout education. Consequently, school improvement can meet needs more effectively when students are engaged as partners and provide feedback and advice to the Board. Listening to student voice encourages adult leaders to appropriately prioritize concerns of the schools and put the interests of the student first. Students know what works for students, and that knowledge can be utilized to assist administration's decision making.

While students make up the majority of any given school, the decisions are routinely made by the small fraction of adults. However, the opinions and comprehension of adolescents should not be undermined. Student voice may be the most powerful lever available to the improvement of schools. It is important for the progression of a school that students are engaged as active and not just treated as part of the problem. By giving a qualified student a non-voting position on the board, youth is empowered with direct representation and provided an opportunity to experience actual, legal policymaking first-hand. Their knowledge of the local government is greatly enhanced and they gain perspective regarding the reason and decision making process behind policies. Exposure to the logic behind decisions results in greater acceptance of decisions made. For that reason, students are more willing to put their investment in school improvement efforts; thus, making policies more successful. A student position on local boards allows students to understand the procedure that goes into developing education and promotes constructive interaction between the community and the local board.

The direct dialogue between the student body and the school board provides the administration with a source of regular, comprehensive feedback from the students affected by their policies; parents and students are better informed of important school policy decisions; and a spirit of self-education on the behalf of students is fostered. I strongly encourage you to consider this proposal as it directly benefits the local board, administration, teachers, parents, and students of the community. Thank you for your consideration and time.